

February 5, 1958

Dr. Barry Commoner
Shaw School of Botany
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Barry:

This will reaffirm our telephone conversation yesterday. We discussed the qualifications of a number of people in microbial genetics whom you might wish to have in your new laboratory development. During that conversation the most likely candidates seemed to be Norton Zinder, who is now at the Rockefeller Institute in New York, and David Nanney, who is at Ann Arbor. Having slept on the matter, I am still unable to make any more promising suggestions than these.

I may have some biographical information on both these men in my files and, if so, will send copies along as enclosures. Zinder was, as you know, my own student, while Nanney was trained with Sonneborn. Both men have been out long enough and have shown a sustained productivity that speaks for their independent abilities. Zinder has been rather cautious about publications but he has some most interesting work nearly ready to write up on lysogenic conversion. An abstract on this was presented at the National Academy meeting in New York and appeared in Science during the last few months. I think you already have a measure of his reputation in Hotchkiss' reaction to your preliminary inquiry. Although he is beginning to be properly appreciated in New York, I still think it would not be entirely futile for you to go after him.

Although he works in a slightly different field, I think that Nanney has a comparable talent, and a rather broader background of biological training. He is thus somewhat less kinetically minded than Zinder. He is very largely responsible for the revival of *tetrahymena* as an object of genetic research. For various reasons, not all of which were under his own control, he has not exploited this organism as much as might be from the point of view of biochemical genetics. This is one reason why his projected fellowship at California Institute of Technology would be useful to him. I hope that that does not put you off however as I would think one could always make some reasonable adjustment of time.

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I have a very high regard for both of these men and if I were in your situation I would consider them very seriously. They certainly qualify for an appointment at the level you indicated. My main concern for either of them would be that you not stress too much and too soon the expected scope of their activities. I think it might be harmful for either of them to be suddenly catapulted to a situation where they had to remove themselves from the laboratory simply in order to "run" the show.

I don't at all want to demean the capacities of any of the other people that we discussed. All of them have some promise. But I think that Zinder and Hanney clearly stand out in the extent to which they have already realized the potentialities that were expected of them as students.

Please let me know if I can be of any other service.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Medical Genetics

JL/ew

Enc: Vital (Hanney, Zinder)